
Comprehensive Plan

All exhibit elements described in order of presentation

Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Work

Exhibit Purpose
P-01-050

Poe's personal life as well as literary world in which he made his living had an impact on his creative expression.

This panel introduces visitors to Poe's life and work shortly after they enter the main exhibit area. It incorporates images and text to tell Poe's life story. These displays are enhanced with tactile and auditory elements on the reader rail that give equal access to the physically challenged and to children who have had, as yet, little exposure to the author.

This theme focuses on what influenced Poe and on the life choices he made. It opens the door to interpretation of Poe's biography and his personal life with his wife and mother-in-law, how he and his family lived, and the impact of his decision to pursue his literary work to the exclusion of other, perhaps more lucrative, ways of making a living. This is the theme that explores the myths and realities of Poe's life.

But it also places family life into context. Poe made his way in the literary world of his times. That world affected where he lived. It had an impact on what he could sell or do to make a living. It produced friends and foes. It built or destroyed reputations.

Primary text
L-01-100

Who Was Edgar Allan Poe? [version 1]

If you have ever watched a detective show on TV or read a mystery novel, you've come under the influence of Edgar Allan Poe. If you have ever enjoyed a science fiction story that projected space story, you are tapping into a lineage that goes right back to Poe. If you have shivered at a scary movie, perhaps you were under Poe's macabre influence.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote and published some of his most famous tales during the six years he lived in Philadelphia. He rented several houses in the city; this is the only one that survives. He lived in this house around 1843 and 1844 with his wife ,Virginia; her mother, Maria Clemm; and their cat, Catterina.

This house serves as a tangible link with Poe and his days of greatness in Philadelphia. For this reason, it is fitting that Congress chose this site as our nation's memorial to Edgar Allan Poe.

Primary text
L-01-100

Who Was Edgar Allan Poe? [version 2]

Edgar Allan Poe casts a long shadow on American literature. Today readers enjoy his macabre and mysterious stories and his beautiful poems. He has influenced writers and artists around the world and was the father of detective stories and science fiction.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote and published some of his most famous tales during the six years he lived in Philadelphia. He rented several houses in the city; this is the only one that survives. He lived in this house around 1843 and 1844 with his wife ,Virginia; her mother, Maria Clemm; and their cat, Catterina.

This house serves as a tangible link with Poe and his days of greatness in Philadelphia. For this reason, it is fitting that Congress chose this site as our nation's memorial to Edgar Allan Poe.

B/W photo
G-01-110



Edgar Allan Poe, daguerreotype taken in Providence, November 9, 1848

Caption
L-01-111

Edgar Allan Poe, a daguerreotype taken in Providence, Rhode Island, on November 9, 1848

Secondary text
L-01-120

This site serves as a tangible link with Poe and his days of greatness in Philadelphia. For this reason, it is fitting that Congress chose Poe's Spring Garden Street house and the adjacent building as our nation's memorial to Edgar Allan Poe.

Caption
L-01-130

Philadelphia in 1850. [ID geographical features? places?]

G-01-135



73 1850 Philadelphia

Caption
L-01-136

Philadelphia in 1850

Artifact
A-01-140

Caption
L-01-141

Caption for bust of Poe; is there artist and date information to include?

Title
L-01-200

Poe and Publishing

Quotation
L-01-205

"Literature is the most noble of professions...I shall be a 'litterateur' at least, all my life; nor would I abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California..."
Poe to Fredrick W. Thomas, Feb. 14, 1849

Primary text
L-01-210

Poe and the Business of Writing

Edgar Allan Poe was not an isolated genius but a man who tried to earn his living by publishing his work in magazines during the 1830s and 1840s. Magazine writing and editing were new careers in the young nation and were made possible by improvements in printing technology and distribution.

Poe could be a productive and disciplined writer. He was a brilliant editor who had firm editorial and aesthetic standards and increased the circulation of publications he worked for. He had satisfying and supportive relationships with other writers and editors—including a number of female writers. He aspired to publish his own literary magazine but never succeeded at this dream.

B/W photo
G-01-215



51 The Stylus; prospectus for proposed literary magazine to be published by Poe

B/W photo
G-01-215



The Saturday Courier headline

Caption
L-01-216

Poe tried to generate interest in a magazine called *The Stylus* that he proposed to edit. This is a sample cover he had drawn up.

Caption
L-01-217

Before Poe moved to Philadelphia, he published several of his earliest short stories in a local magazine called *The Saturday Courier*.

Secondary text
L-01-220

The Short Story Writer

“Thus I have written no books and have been so far essentially a magazinist.”

Poe began his literary career as a poet, but his early volumes did not sell. Magazine publishers wanted short fiction, and Poe discovered he had a gift for horrific and suspenseful stories—winning a \$100 prize for his story “The Gold Bug.” Other stories Poe wrote in Philadelphia include “Murders in the Rue Morgue” and “The Masque of the Red Death.”

G-01-225



Caption
L-01-226

Edgar Allan Poe in 1845 (?)

Secondary text
L-01-230

The Critic

“The book before us is too imbecile to merit an extended critique...but as one of a class of absurdities with an inundation of which our country is grievously threatened—we shall have no hesitation, and shall spare no pains, in exposing fully before the public eye its four hundred and forty-three pages of utter folly, bombast, and inanity.” [need ID of this review or similar—where article appeared and who skewered]

Poe’s short stories may have won contests, but it was his criticism of other writers’ work that caused tongues to wag. His witty and devastating reviews caused controversy and made him a literary celebrity. His standards were high and he demanded excellence from America’s writers.

G-01-235



68 G Graham

Caption
L-01-236

George Rex Graham (1813-1894) hired Poe to edit *Graham's Magazine*. He paid his freelance writers well, but Poe found it difficult to live on the salary he received.

Secondary text
L-01-240

While in Philadelphia, Poe worked for *Burton's Gentleman's* and *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's* magazines. The audience for Burton's magazine was the man about town, and Poe wrote articles on everything from gymnastics to Stonehenge. Although the editorial burden was heavy, Poe was never more productive.

Poe saw the possibilities of financial success in magazines such as *Blackwood's* in Great Britain and the *New York Knickerbocker*, two successful magazines that featured short stories based on the popular gothic style.

During his time in Philadelphia, Poe developed a prospectus for a magazine called *The Penn*, a monthly literary journal. In it, he would publish only the finest fiction and criticism—including, of course, his own work. Due to a financial panic and his increasingly shaky reputation, Poe never collected enough funds to publish *The Penn*.

B/W photo
G-01-245



62 Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine, edited by Poe

Caption
L-01-246

“Permanent Employ.” As a magazine editor, Poe's essays, reviews, and articles in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, published in Richmond, not only increased the circulation of the magazine, but helped hone his skills for bigger and better markets.

Caption
L-01-246

William Evans Burton (1804-1860), known to everyone as “Billy,” hired Poe to edit his *Gentleman's Magazine*. As was the case of most of Poe's employment, he left the magazine with new enemies, including Graham.

G-01-247

Secondary title
L-01-250

61 W Burton

Making a Living

"[Poe] is *very* poor. I told him to write something for every number of your magazine, and that you might find it to your advantage to give him some permanent employ."

- John P. Pendleton to Thomas White, proprietor of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, convincing the latter to hire Poe after Poe has been contributing from Baltimore to the magazine (The Poe Log p. 149).

Poe's short stories, poems, and criticism were very popular during his lifetime. Yet he found it very difficult to make a living, and he sometimes had to beg acquaintances for money to make ends meet. Magazine publishers tried to keep their costs down. Because there was no international copyright law during Poe's lifetime, and much of his work was reprinted in America and Europe without permission or payment.

B/W illustration
G-01-255Caption
L-01-256

64 Duvall's Litho Establishment, Philadelphia

Peter S. Duval operated one of several printing plants in Philadelphia. [is there more to be said? Did he print Grahams? Burtons?]

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/collections/rbm/keffer/duval.html>

Secondary text
L-01-260

Sidebar

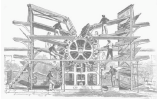
The Rise of the American Magazine

Poe lived during an information revolution. Between 1825 and 1850, there was a 600 percent rise in the number of American periodicals. New printing technologies would feed this huge growth, as well as the diffusion of public education, improvements in eyeglasses, and wider distribution of printed works by a growing networks of railroads, whose passengers also welcomed easy-to-read fare that could be dropped into a valise or carpetbag.

Many of the mushrooming new magazines would die after a few issues; few would last more than a year or two. But within a quarter century the country would produced altogether some four or five thousand of them.

G-01-265

Hoe Lightning Press 1854



Caption
L-01-266

Advances in printing press technology contributed to the explosion in the number of magazines in the nineteenth century. This is Hoe's Lightning Press, manufactured in 1854.

B/W photo
G-01-300

77 Publishing house



Title
L-01-300

Philadelphia through Poe's Eyes

Primary text
L-01-300

New Horizons, New Goals

“In 1830 Philadelphia had been a booming town, but still a place whose manners followed the familiar paths of English and American provincial towns. By 1860 the flood of change had so far run that Philadelphia had become something new to America—a modern big city.”

Sam Bass Warner, Jr. *The Private City* (1987, p. 49)

Edgar Allan Poe and his family lived in Philadelphia from 1838 to 1844, the six most productive years of his life. Although the city was noted for its tranquility—one visitor said that “the first idea that strikes you when you arrive at Philadelphia is that it is Sunday”—in this era it bustled with commerce and industry.

Philadelphians of Poe’s era were proud of their Water Works and the gas streetlights installed in 1836. A city of artisans and merchants, of graceful public buildings designed in a classical style, Philadelphia had been called the “Athens of America” by artist Gilbert Stuart.

Quotation
L-01-301

**“Literature is the most noble of professions...I shall be a ‘litterateur’ at least, all my life;
nor would I abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California....”**

-Poe to Frederick W. Thomas, Feb 14, 1849

Color photo
G-01-305



69 Eastman House

B/W illustration
G-01-306



94 Merchants Exchange, Philadelphia

Caption
L-01-306

Eastman House?

Caption
L-01-307

Merchants' Exchange

Secondary text
L-01-310

Cultural & Publishing Center

"The torrent of printed material left its imprint on America's cities. The technological advances in printing in the 1830s led to a consolidation, and urbanization, of the industry. By 1840, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia would account for 90 percent of the fiction in the United States."

(Paul Erickson, "New Books, New Men," p.277).

Ambitious writers like Poe were drawn to Philadelphia because, with New York, the city led the nation in book and periodical publishing. In the 1830s and 1840s many U.S. readers still looked to England for literary excellence. But the Philadelphia firm of Cary and Lea specialized in publishing American writers such as Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper. Many other publishers, small and large, clustered in the city. Seven morning newspapers were published daily and two evening papers along with weekly and monthly journals.

[source: Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance, pp. 140-141, NPS Poe Study guide]

Color illustration
G-01-315



Godey's April 1861 [look for 1840s image?]

B/W photo
G-01-316



87 John Sartain, engraver; assisted Poe

Caption
L-01-316

"Fashion plates" of the latest wear from Paris and London captivated readers. The best-known was Godey's Lady's Book, one of the most popular magazines of its day. Poe had nothing but contempt for such publications but did not hesitate to sell "The Cask of Amontillado" to them.

Caption
L-01-316

John Sartain (1808-1897) was one of Poe's most loyal friends. He made good money as an engraver. Although photography was widespread, it was not possible at the time to reproduce photographs and reproductions were often engraved.

Secondary text
L-01-320

Industrial Center

If Philadelphia seemed too tranquil at times to mid-nineteenth century visitors, the industrial revolution had begun to transform the city in the 1830s. Manufacturing was fueled by the state's rich veins of coal, transported by canal and railroad. Machines spun cloth, iron works roared, sugar was refined and distributed. Farmers, freed slaves, and Irish immigrants hustled to the city and worked from dawn to dusk, six days a week, to bring home their wages.

Secondary text
L-01-330

New Urban Literature

"Others, still a numerous class, were restless in their movements, had flushed faces, and talked and gesticulated to themselves, as if feeling in solitude on account of the very denseness of the company around."

"The Man of the Crowd," (1840), Edgar Allan Poe.

The pulsing beat of the new city inspired some writers and repelled others. Poe, often a snob, distrusted democracy. Other writers such as George Lippard wrote with horror of urban life, but its vitality runs through his fiction: "*a mass of miserable frame houses seemed about to commit suicide and fling themselves madly into the gutter, and in the distance a long line of dwellings, offices, and factories, looming in broken perspective, looked as if they wanted to shake hands across the narrow street.*" (*The Quaker City*, 1844)

G-01-335

85 G Lippard



Caption
L-01-335

George Lippard (1822-1854) befriended Poe. He wrote lurid and lively novels, including Gothic tales and historical romances.

G-01-336



Caption

L-01-336

91 The Quaker City

Lurid true crime tales gripped readers.

G-01-337



Secondary text

L-01-340

93 City Crimes

Sidebar: Chaotic Democracy

“During the last ten days, or thereabouts, the sober inhabitants of the District of Kensington have been all alive with a delightful little war of their own—a nice rough-and-tumble affair....”

“The Rail-Road War” (1840), Edgar Allan Poe, *Alexander Weekly Messenger*

During Poe’s lifetime, the national debate over the morality of slavery headed toward the crisis of the Civil War. Freed African Americans had always played an important role in Philadelphia and men had the right to vote since 1790. This was revoked in 1838. Competition for jobs with Irish immigrants led to riots in 1838 and 1842. Anti-Catholic riots exploded in 1844. These disturbances tarnished the city’s reputation for religious and racial tolerance.

Many long-time residents of Philadelphia supported the abolition of slavery. Although born in Boston, Poe was raised in Richmond, Virginia, and probably grew up around slaves. Much of Poe’s fiction takes place in Europe, but where African Americans appear, they are often seen as foolish and superstitious. Poe opposed the abolition of slavery and defended Southern interests to his northern readers.

B/W illustration

G-01-345



95 Philadelphia riots

Caption
L-01-346

The 1840s were a tumultuous time in Philadelphia. In 1844 anti_Catholic and anti-foreigner riots exploded and several churches and schools were torched.

Primary text
L-01-400

Philadelphia through Poe's Eyes

What was Philadelphia like in the 1840s when Poe lived here? What would he have seen as he walked to work at Graham's magazine? Who were the other denizens of the city? What were the hot topics in the living rooms, on the street, and in the taverns?

B/W photo
G-01-400



Poe's birthplace

Title
L-01-400

Poe and His Family

Primary text
L-01-401

"In Sunshine and in Shadow"*

Following his marriage in 1836 to his cousin, when Poe was 27 and Virginia Clemm was 13, the writer sought new prospects every eighteen months or so. Before settling in Philadelphia in 1838, Poe, "Sissy," and her mother Maria Clemm, or "Muddy" had lived in Baltimore, Richmond, and New York.

By the time Poe moved to this city, he had some publishing successes and his future looked bright. The six years Poe spent in Philadelphia were perhaps the happiest of his life. He had steady work and, for the most part, he and his wife were healthy. The shadows of loss and conflict that plagued his life, however, were never far away.

*From "El Dorado"

Secondary text
L-01-410

Poe's Household

"In the little lean-to, besides the poet and his interesting wife, there was but one other dweller. This was a woman of middle age, and almost masculine aspect. A stranger would have been incredulous – surprised, as I was, when introduced to her as the mother of that angelic creature who had accepted Edgar Poe as the partner of her life."

- Novelist Mayne Reid on Muddy, April ?, 1843 (*The Poe Log* p.410)

Poe's Spring Garden house was modest. He rented inexpensive apartments or houses, often in the suburbs or country, and he and his family lived as simply and cheaply as possible. A visitor described a house on Sixteenth Street as "comfortable inside for one of its kind. The rooms looked neat and orderly, but everything...wore an air of pecuniary want."

Despite their poverty, the little family was happy. Another visitor noted that Virginia had a voice of "wonderful sweetness, and was an exquisite singer." Always frail, the young woman burst a blood vessel while singing. She lingered for five years before dying of tuberculosis in 1847. More a mother than a mother-in-law, "Muddy" continued to look after Poe until his own death two years later.

B/W photo
G-01-415



26 Maria Clemm

B/W photo
G-01-416



25 Virginia Poe

Caption
L-01-416

Maria Clemm (1790-1871), Poe's mother-in-law and aunt, kept house and provided moral support for the writer even after her daughter died.

Caption
L-01-417

Virginia Poe (1822) was known for her beauty and fragility.

Secondary text
L-01-420

Death of an Actress

"Tuesday. Died, on last Sunday morning, [December 8] Mrs. Poe....The Stage has been deprived of one of its chief ornaments."
"The Richmond Enquirer, November 29, 1811"

The most poetic subject for a work of art, Poe said, is "the death of a beautiful woman," and it was topic he was to turn to frequently. Poe's life was shaped by the demise of Elizabeth Poe, his lovely actress mother, when he was two years old. Many of the harrowing and theatrical scenes of Poe's stories and poems were drawn from this early loss.

B/W photo
G-01-425



Caption
L-01-426

8 Eliza Poe

Elizabeth Poe died, probably of tuberculosis, at the age of twenty-four. She had been abandoned by Edgar's father, David Poe, two years earlier. Mrs. Poe had been born in England and had been an actress from the age of 9. "Although a Miss of only nine years old, her powers as an Actress would do credit to any of her sex of mature age."
- *Eastern Herald and Gazette of Maine*, November 28, 1796

Secondary text
L-01-430

Early Struggles

"Here you will say that it was my own fault that I did not return...I will boldly say that it was wholly and entirely your own mistaken parsimony that caused all the difficulties in which I was involved while at Charlottesville."

- Edgar Allan Poe to John Allan, January 3, 1831

John Allan, a successful Richmond merchant, brought the young Edgar into his household when Elizabeth Poe died. Although Allan educated and took good care of the boy, he never adopted him.

Poe battled with his foster father for support while he was at the University of Virginia and West Point. Allan accused Poe of gambling; the young man said his father was stingy. Allan died when Poe was twenty-five and left him no part of his wealth. Poe grew up well-to-do but was to struggle with poverty—and men in authority—for the rest of his life.

G-01-435

19 West Point / Reader Rail



Caption
L-01-436

Following a stint in the army, Poe enrolled at West Point. After less than a year he decided life at the military academy was not for him, and he was court martialed.

Secondary text
L-01-440

Poe's Flirtations

In England, women such as Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*) and Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*) wrote novels of terror and imagination that influenced Poe. He was often harsh in his reviews of poetry and fiction written by American women, but he could also be a generous and fair mentor.

After the death of his wife Virginia, Poe courted a number of literary ladies and edited the work of the wives of businessmen with more money than talent. At the time of his death he was engaged to a Richmond widow who had been his childhood sweetheart. More than one of these ladies believed themselves to be the inspiration for Poe's later poems.

B/W photo
G-01-445



37 Sarah Helen Whitman

G-01-445



40 Elmira Shelton

Secondary text
L-01-450

Sidebar: The Death of a Poet

"There is a gentleman, rather the worse for wear, at Ryan's 4th Ward polls, who goes under the cognomen of Edgar A. Poe, and who appears in great distress...he is in need of immediate assistance."

Joseph W. Walker to Joseph Evans Snodgrass, October 3, 1849 (The Poe Log p.844).

In the last weeks of his life, Edgar Allan Poe had plans to travel the eastern seaboard seeking funding for *The Stylus*, the literary journal he intended to publish. In Richmond he mingled with literary society and became engaged to marry. Returning north, he was waylaid in Baltimore, where he died on October 7, 1849, in mysterious circumstances. He was 40 years old.

The cause of Poe's death is one of the great mysteries of American literature and has only deepened the shadows that darkened his life. Theories abound, but we will probably never know if he died as a consequence of drinking, assault, disease, or a congenital condition.

B/W photo
G-01-455



41 Poe, last known daguerreotype

Primary text
L-01-500

Poe Timeline / Reader Rail

Primary text
L-01-500

Edgar Allan Poe, His Life, Work, and Times

[Please see Word file for coherent version....]

Date Life Work Cultural, Political, & Social Context

| | | |
|------|---|---|
| 1809 | Poe born in Boston | Thomas Jefferson president |
| | Abraham Lincoln born | |
| 1811 | Edgar's mother Elizabeth dies; boy is adopted by John and Frances Allan | South American nations declare independence from Spain |
| 1814 | | British forces burn Washington, D.C. during the War of 1812 |
| 1815 | Edgar Allan travels to England | British defeated at Battle of New Orleans |
| 1818 | | Mary Shelley publishes <i>Frankenstein</i> |
| 1819 | | Herman Melville born |
| | Walt Whitman born | |
| 1820 | Edgar Allan returns to Richmond, Virginia | James Monroe re-elected president |
| 1826 | Attends University of Virginia | Thomas Jefferson & John Adams die |
| 1827 | Enlists in U.S. Army | <i>Tamerlane and Other Poems</i> Poet William Blake dies |
| 1828 | | Construction of first U.S. railroad begins |
| 1829 | Frances Allan dies | <i>Al Araf, Tamerlane, Minor Poems</i> |
| | Andrew Jackson president | |
| 1830 | Enters West Point | Emily Dickinson born |
| 1831 | Leaves West Point | Nat Turner's slave rebellion, Virginia |
| 1832 | "Metzengerstein" | Lewis Carroll born |
| 1833 | "Ms. Found in a Bottle" | Slavery banned in Great Britain |
| 1834 | Foster father John Allan dies | |
| 1835 | Joins <i>Southern Literary Messenger</i> | "Berenice" |
| | "Morella" | |
| | Mark Twain born | |
| 1836 | Marries cousin Virginia Clemm | Battle of the Alamo |
| 1837 | Resigns from <i>Messenger</i> | Victoria becomes queen of England |
| 1838 | Moves to Philadelphia | "Ligeia" |
| 1839 | Joins <i>Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine</i> | "The Fall of the House of Usher" |
| | Louis Daguerre invents early photography | |

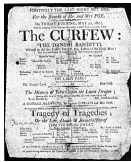
1840 Leaves *Burton's Gentlemen's Magazine* *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* U.S. Capt. Charles Wilkes circumnavigates Antarctica
 1841 Joins *Graham's Magazine* "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" William Henry Harrison and John Tyler, presidents
 1842 Leaves *Graham's Magazine* Virginia Poe falls ill "The Masque of the Red Death"
 "The Pit and the Pendulum" First Opium War ends
 1843 Moves to 7th & Spring Garden streets "The Tell-Tale Heart"
 "The Black Cat"
 "The Gold Bug" First wagon train hits Oregon trail
 1844 Moves to New York City "The Premature Burial" First telegram sent
 1845 Becomes owner of *The Broadway Journal* "The Raven" U.S.-Mexican War begins
 James Polk president

B/W illustration
G-01-520



Boston Common / Reader Rail

B/W photo
G-01-523



9 Playbill / Reader Rail

B/W photo
G-01-525



10 John Allan

B/W photo
G-01-526



11 Frances Allan

G-01-527



15 Richmond Reader Rail

G-01-528



16 University of Virginia / Reader Rail

G-01-529



17 Poe U.S. Army enlistment document / Reader Rail

G-01-530



20 Baltimore / Reader Rail

B/W photo

G-01-531



22 Neilson Poe / reader rail

B/W photo

G-01-533



24 Poe by McKee / reader rail

G-01-535



66 Graham's Lady's and Gentlemen's magazine; reader rail

B/W photo
G-01-540



31 Poe House, reader rail

B/W photo
G-01-545



New York, reader rail

B/W photo
G-01-546



33 Fordham Cottage reader rail

Audio program
E-01-550

Program describes Poe's time in Philadelphia

Audio program
E-01-551

Akman Flash MPX
Stop & Listen Inc. Walker WS-2552-00 Handset

Audio program
E-01-555

Program describes Poe's family history.

Audio program
E-01-556

Akman Flash MPX
Stop & Listen Inc. Walker WS-2552-00 Handset

“An indescribable something...men call genius”

Video program

E-02-001

Video program demonstrating Poe’s blend of discipline and imagination. This exhibit element is intended to create a kinetic and intriguing moment in the exhibit experience that conveys the central theme, that of the writer’s story. It demonstrates that Poe’s work was not accomplished by any writing machine but laboriously produced by hand and that his craft took both discipline and imagination

Video program

E-02-002

17” LCD MOnitor
DVD Player
Akman Flash MPX
Stop & Listen Inc. Walker WS-2552-00 Handset

Exhibit Purpose

P-02-050

Edgar Allan Poe’s life is a case study in the expression of a society’s reaction to creative genius.

At many parks there is a story that is so fundamental that all other interpretive messages rest upon it, so compelling that it transcends all others.

In the case of Edgar Allan Poe, that story is human creativity. Nearly 200 years after Poe’s birth, we still ask how he could write the way he did? What accounted for his literary genius? Why do his works still inspire such fascination?

When asked about Poe, those questions point to a more fundamental line of inquiry. How is creative genius received by the world at large? Society simultaneously embraced and rejected Poe’s writings. Some felt his works too dark and morbid, his criticism too brutal. Others regarded his criticism as a much-needed wake-up call from the old system of puffery and regarded his stories as startlingly original and stimulating. Why does society sometimes have difficulty recognizing and embracing creativity?

Poe demonstrated the breadth of his creative genius by mastering and even pioneering a variety of literary forms.

Primary text
L-02-100

“An indescribable something...men call genius”

“Poe was a keen observer of the natural world and psychological states: Mr. Poe has the indescribable something which men have agreed to call genius—a faculty of vigorous, yet minute analysis, and a wonderful fecundity of imagination...”

--James Russell Lowell in *Graham’s Magazine*, February, 1845, (Quinn pp. 432-433.)

Why does Poe’s work still hold power over us today? Why do we read his work and not that of the host of tale tellers whose stories filled the columns of 19th-century magazines and journals?

Not only did Poe transcend the literary genres of the day, but he created new forms of popular fiction, including detective stories and science fiction. As a literary critic, he held other writers to high standards in creating a new American voice—standards he also expected from his own work. Contrary to the myth of the tortured and destructive artist, Poe was a productive, imaginative, and innovative writer.

Secondary text
L-02-100

100 Short Stories

“You want strength, novelty, compactness, intensity of interest, a single vivid impression left upon the mind. Poe is the master of all....Poe is, to my mind, the supreme original short story writer of all time.”

Arthur Conan Doyle, *Through the Magic Door*

Title
L-02-105

The Short Stories

Secondary text
L-02-110

110 The Gold Bug: Deciphering Poe (Cryptography)

Edgar Allan Poe wowed his readers by solving ciphers they sent in. He incorporated his skill into the short story “The Gold Bug,” in which a pirate map and code are used to find buried treasure.

- Gold bug drawing resembles a death’s head
- Heat reveals drawing of a young goat (a kid = Captain Kidd)
- Substitution cipher
- Message tells where buried treasure is

Solving the cipher tells where on the head panel the gold bug is—the gold bug can be a rubbing on this panel or the reader rail in section 3.

Cipher can be on top of flip panel and the key underneath.

Secondary text
L-02-120

Tell-Tale Heart

“The disease had sharpened my senses...above all, the sense of hearing was acute. I heard all things in heaven and earth. I heard many things in hell. How, then, am I mad?”

“‘Villians!’ I shrieked, ‘dissemble no more! I admit the dead!—tear up the planks!—here, here! It is the beating of his hideous heart!’”

Door or slide panel reveals throbbing, glowing heart.

Poe’s horror stories explore extreme psychological states. In the “Tell-Tale Heart” the narrator becomes obsessed with an old man’s stare. He murders the man and believes that he has committed the perfect crime. In this perfectly crafted and very short story, suspense keeps us reading. Will the murder be discovered?

When the police come, the audible beating of the murdered man’s heart gives him away. Is it really beating—or is it all in the narrator’s mind?

[Is anything about this potentially offensive to the hearing-impaired?]

Secondary text
L-02-130

The Purloined Letter

The first detective in literary history, C. Auguste Dupin, finds an incriminating letter that a thief has taken (*purloined* means “stolen”). Dupin, who has a sharp mind, discovers it by “an identification of the reasoner’s intellect with that of his opponent.”

The thief’s strategy was to **hide the letter in plain sight**. Can *you* find the purloined letter? [The words “purloined letter” are screened large and at 20% or so on the panel...or something.]

Secondary text
L-02-140

Vignettes

Flip panels and pullout drawers can reveal key scenes from:

- The Black Cat
- Descent into the Maelstrom
- Orangutans of “Murders in the Rue Morgue”
- Images from source material for “Marie Roget”
- A pendulum
- Maelzel’s Chess Player
- Berenice’s teeth

Secondary text
L-02-150

Poe’s science fiction visions of the future

Flip panels, sliding drawers, or other glimpses at other worlds

Title
L-02-200

The Poetry

Secondary text
L-02-210

210 Lord of Rhythm: The Bells

“I would define...the Poetry of words as The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty.”

Poe, “The Poetic Principle,” (published 1850)

The insistent rhythms of “The Bells” moves the reader from cheerful holiday bells to terrible alarms signaling disaster and death.

A/V of a reading of “The Bells” with stresses of the rhythm marked as the lines scroll by on the screen.

Secondary text
L-02-220

The Raven

Flip book of “The Raven”

Poe let no word appear in his later poetry by accident. He outlined his strategies in writing “The Raven”:

- The night is stormy so the raven would seek to come inside.
- The bird lands on a white marble bust (a sculpted head) to contrast with its black feathers, giving the reader a strong visual image.
- It is a bust of Pallas (Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom) to show how studious the scholar is.
- The student is mourning his “lost Lenore” because “the death...of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world.”
- The poem is 108 lines long because Poe believed no one would read a longer poem in one sitting.
- For his refrain, Poe chose the long o as “the most sonorous vowel in connection with r as the most producible consonant”: N E V E R M O R E
- Poe sought to be original above all in the poem’s rhythm and claimed that he was the first to use the meter in the “Raven.” (For the technically minded: a octameter acatalectic combined with a heptameter catalectic terminating with a tetrameter catalectic. Got that?)

What other effects does Poe use?

[From “The Philosophy of Composition,” <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/poe/composition.html>

Secondary text
L-02-230

230 Raven Tactile Element

Rubbing of a Raven, with legend NEVERMORE underneath

Title
L-02-300

The Critic and Writer

Secondary text
L-02-305

Flipbook of choice reviews by Poe

Poe earned his reputation as a reviewer of the works of other authors. He had very high standards, which he did not always apply to himself, and seemed to enjoy causing a literary mischief.

“THE LONGFELLOW WARS”

“....we find that Mr. Clark has made a little mistake – at which we are not a little astonished. Mr. Poe does not say that Professor Longfellow’s poem is ‘imitated’ from Tennyson. He calls it a bare-faced and barbarous plagiarism....”

- *Poe in Alexander’s Weekly, February 12, 1840 (The Poe Log, pp.289-290).*

Quotation
L-02-310

Quotes about the creative process and being a writer:

“Most writers--poets in especial--prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy--an ecstatic intuition--and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought--at the true purposes seized only at the last moment--at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view--at the fully-matured fancies discarded in despair as unmanageable--at the cautious selections and rejections--at the painful erasures and interpolations--in a word, at the wheels and pinions--the tackle for scene-shifting--the step-ladders, and demon-traps--the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary histrio.”

(“The Philosophy of Composition,” 1846)

Quotation
L-02-311

“In the construction of *plot*, for example, in fictitious literature, we should aim at so arranging the points, or incidents, that we cannot distinctly see, in respect to any one of them, whether that one depends from any other, or upholds it. In this sense, of course, perfection of plot is unattainable in fact,--because Man is the constructor. The plots of God are perfect. The Universe is a Plot of God.”

(Marginalia, from *The Unknown Poe*)

Quotation
L-02-312

“An artist is an artist only by dint of his exquisite sense of Beauty—a sense affording him rapturous enjoyment, but at the same time...an equally exquisite sense of Deformity or disproportion.”

Quotation
L-02-313

“Let a man succeed ever so evidently—ever so demonstrably in many different displays of *genius*, the envy of criticism will agree with the popular voice in denying him more than *talent*....What the world calls genius is the state of mental disease...the works of such genius are never sound in themselves.”

Quotation
L-02-314

“That the imagination has not been unjustly ranked as supreme among the mental faculties, appears from the intense consciousness, on the part of the imaginative man, that the faculty in question brings his soul often to a glimpse of things supernal and eternal—to the very verge of *great secrets*.”

Quotation
L-02-315

“If any ambitious man have a fancy to revolutionize, at one effort, the universal world of human thought, human opinion, and human sentiment, the opportunity is his own—the road to immortal renown lies straight, open, and unencumbered before him. All he has to do is to write and publish a very little book. Its title should be simple—a few plain words—“My Heart Laid Bare.” But—this little book must be *true to its title*.

(Marginalia, from *The Unknown Poe*)

Quotation
L-02-320

Rubbing of Poe’s Brain Image

"Everything leads to Poe..."

P-03-050

Poe's influence on literary expression as well as popular culture began during his lifetime and continues today.

This theme focuses on the impact that Poe has had on a variety of literary genres and on authors who have worked in those genres. His influence is longstanding and widespread, not confined to the U.S. Both Poe's literature and his life have entered popular culture where they continue to inspire art, music, and film.

Section title from Ginsberg's quote: "Everything leads to Poe.... You can trace all literary art to Poe's influence: Burroughs, Baudelaire, Genet, Dylan....It all leads back to Poe."

Title

L-03-100

"Everything leads to Poe..."

Primary text

L-03-110

Famous Around the World

"Everything leads to Poe.... You can trace all literary art to Poe's influence: Burroughs, Baudelaire, Genet, Dylan....It all leads back to Poe."

Poet Allen Ginsberg from "Producer's Notes" of "Closed on Account of Rabies...." 1997

"...it's because I was so taken with the Poe stories that I later made suspense films.... I've tried to put in my films with what Edgar Allan Poe puts in his [works]: a completely unbelievable story told to the reader with such a spellbinding logic that you get the impression that the same thing could happen to you tomorrow."

- Alfred Hitchcock in a 1961 essay, "Why I Am Afraid of the Dark"

Secondary text
L-03-120

Map

1. Japan

Edogawa Rampo

2. Russia

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky

3. Italy/France

Tre passi nel delirio (“Spirits of the Dead” in U.S. release, 1968 compilation film, with films by Federico Fellini, Louis Malle, & Roger Vadim)

4. Australia

Case book novels, 19th cent., Mary Fortune & James Skipp Borlase

5. Argentina

Novelist Jorge Luis Borges

6. France

Poet Charles Baudelaire

7. France

Jules Verne

8. Great Britain

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

9. Great Britain

Oscar Wilde

10. Great Britain

The Beatles

11. United States

Alfred Hitchcock

Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler)

Batman: Nevermore (DC Comics)

Augusta Read Thomas (composer)

Stephen King

Audio program
E-03-150

Program describes Poe's influences on the literary world.

Audio program
E-03-151

Akman Flash MPX
Stop & Listen Inc. Walker WS-2552-00 Handset

Secondary title
L-03-200

Literary Influences

"Each of Poe's stories is a root from which a whole literature has developed. Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?"

- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories (*Poe Encyclopedia*, p. 103)

Secondary text
L-03-210

1. Japan

Edogawa Rampo

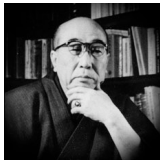
Mystery writer Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965, born Taro Hirai) published the first modern Japanese detective stories, beginning in the 1920s. His pen name is a Japanese version of "Edgar Allan Poe."

Image: Edogawa Rampo

http://www.rikkyo.ac.jp/~koho/ranpo/about/about_03.html

G-03-215

Japanese novelist Edogawa Rampo



Secondary text
L-03-220

2. Russia

Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) called Poe "an enormously talented writer," favorable reviewing Poe's detective stories and referencing "The Raven" in his novel *The Brothers Karamasov*.

G-03-225



Illustration of Dostoyevsky's *The Brother's Karamasov* by Stephen Alcorn. 1984 woodblock print

Secondary text
L-03-230

Australia

Nineteenth-century detective novelists such as Mary Fortune and James Skipp Borlase acknowledged a debt to Poe's detective stories. Set in the outback instead of urban scenes, and featuring bodies found in bizarre settings, these novels emphasize problem-solving and tracking clues.

<http://home.aol.com/mg4273/casebook.htm>

G-03-235



Cover of *Ned Kelly* by Australian James Skipp Borlase

Secondary text
L-03-240

Argentina

Argentine novelist Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) published short stories that reflect the mysterious mood of many of Poe's horror and detective fiction. He translated Poe into Spanish.

G-03-245



Jorge Luis Borges in the Cretan Labyrinth

Secondary text
L-03-250

France

Poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), notorious in France for his collection *Flowers of Evil*, translated many of Poe's stories and poems into French. He declared that Poe's stories had long existed in his own brain but had never taken shape.

G-03-255

141 Baudelaire



Secondary text
L-03-260

France

Jules Verne (1828-1905), the pioneering science fiction writer and author of *Twenty thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth* drew inspiration from Poe's tales of fantastic adventures such as "A Descent into the Maelström." Verne wrote a sequel to the *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*.

G-03-265

An illustration from Jules Vernes's *From the Earth to the Moon*



Secondary text
L-03-270

Great Britain

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930), who created Sherlock Holmes, credits Poe with inspiring him to write stories featuring the detective's logical feats.

G-03-275

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



Secondary text
L-03-280

Great Britain

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), like Poe, focused on the aesthetic. Both poets explored psychology and beauty and stayed away from moralizing in their works and Wilde called Poe “this marvelous lord of rhythmic expression.”

G-03-285



Oscar Wilde

Secondary text
L-03-290

USA

Rufus Griswold

Poe’s reputation as a fierce critic earned him the enmity of fellow writers, especially Rufus Griswold, an earlier admirer. Griswold took advantage of Poe’s death to begin a successful defamation campaign, beginning with this slanderous Obituary:

Poe’s death “will startle many, but few will be grieved by it. The poet was well known personally or by reputation, in all this country; he had readers in England, and in several of the states of Continental Europe; but he had few or no Friends; and the regrets of his death will be suggested principally by the consideration that in him literary art lost one of its most brilliant, but erratic stars.”

Rufus Griswold as “Ludwig” in the Daily Tribune for October 9, 1849 (Poe Log. p.849)

B/W photo
G-03-290



Rufus Griswold

Secondary title
L-03-300

Popular Culture Influences

Add Quote

Secondary text
L-03-310

Italy/France

Tre passi nel delirio (“Spirits of the Dead” in U.S. release, 1968 compilation film, with films by Federico Fellini, Louis Malle, & Roger Vadim)

In 1968 famed filmmakers Federico Fellini, Louis Malle, and Roger Vadim directed compilation films based—*very* loosely—on the Poe horror stories “Never Bet the Devil Your Head,” “William Wilson,” and “Metzengerstein.”

G-03-315



Terence Stamp in the “Toby Dammit” section of *Spirits of the Dead*, directed by Federico Fellini (1968). Based on the story “Never Bet the Devil Your Head”

Secondary text
L-03-320

Great Britain

The Beatles included Edgar Allan Poe among their pantheon of heroes on the cover of *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*.

G-03-325



The Beatles, *Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*

Secondary text
L-03-330

United States

Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980), an English-born director working in the United States, acknowledged that he drew on Poe’s suspense and creepy effects in his work. “...both Poe and I are prisoners of the suspense genre. If I made *Cinderella* into a movie, everyone would look for a corpse. And if Poe had written *Sleeping Beauty* they’d be looking for a murderer!”

G-03-335



Secondary text
L-03-340

Alfred Hitchcock and a close friend

Children's author **Lemony Snicket** (Daniel Handler, b. 1970) gives the unfortunate orphaned Baudelaire children an ineffectual caretaker: Mr. Poe.

G-03-345



Secondary text
L-03-350

Mr. Poe from Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events*

Batman: Nevermore

In 2003 Batman teams up with Edgar Allan Poe to solve crimes in nineteenth-century Baltimore.

G-03-355



Secondary text
L-03-360

Batman Nevermore

Contemporary composer **Augusta Read Thomas** wrote an opera *Ligeia* in 1994.

G-03-365



Secondary text
L-03-370

Augusta Read Thomas

Horror novelist **Stephen King** said: "Perhaps the best tale of inside evil ever written is Poe's 'Tell-Tale Heart' where murder is committed out of pure evil, with no mitigating circumstances whatever to tincture the brew."

G-03-375



Stephen King

Flip Book
E-03-400

Flip book containing captions from 03-200 and 03-300. Visitors flip through the captions and images then push a button to locate the artist on the world map. Artist's country illuminates with LEDs.

Comment Book
E-03-500

Visitors have the opportunity to leave their thoughts regarding Poe.

Secondary text
L-03-501

Your Favorite Poe?

Which is your favorite Poe tale or poem? What is your favorite Poe interpretation? Tell us now...or remain silent FOREVERMORE!

Tour Staging Area

Video program

E-04-100

Universal Access tour of the Poe House

Touchscreen monitor

E-04-101

Interactive kiosk with all components fully integrated. Components include: Industrial computer with Celeron or Pentium processor . DVD player. Samsung 17" touchscreen speakers. Stainless steel finish.